



Manuel R. Ochoa inspects a Piper Warrior during Flight Awareness Summer Training here recently. He is an Air Force ROTC cadet from New Mexico State University.

Photo by 2nd Lt. Sara Banda

Air Force's FAST encourages minority students to fly

**BY TECH. SGT.
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WASHINGTON—The Air Force's Flight Awareness Summer Training orientation program encourages ROTC cadets in minority-based college and university programs to investigate careers in aviation.

Recently, 22 cadets enrolled in the three-week program at Delaware State University attended the FAST forum at Dover AFB. The orientation offers 20 hours of flight instruction that can be applied in the university or on active duty.

The program traces its roots back to 1996, when the Air Force reviewed pilot demographics and found that of the 15,300 pilots on active duty, less than 2 percent were black and about

1.5 percent were Hispanic-American.

As a result, the Air Force established and funded the orientation program at the university to assist recruitment, selection and cadet travel from ROTC detachments, said Alain Hunter, program manager assigned to the secretary of the Air Force's office of small and disadvantaged business utilization.

The office staff conceived the program after visiting more than 50 percent of the nation's historically black colleges and universities and 20 percent of other minority institutions. Hunter emphasized that the program targets minority institutions, but is not race-based.

The Air Force program supports the university's airway-science program that produces minority pilots. The university owns eight aircraft and provides program instruction and management with its own faculty and staff.

At first, a 10-week program was designed to provide Federal Aviation Administration pilot license flight training and aerospace orientation to senior cadets. Twenty-five cadets completed the program, and 20 serve on active duty as pilots or in related vocations in the flight-training pipeline.

In 1998, a three-week program replaced it. Ninety-six cadets have completed the program.

"This program is awesome," said Derrick A. Cash, a business administration student at Morehouse College in Atlanta. "This is an excellent opportunity to pursue a career in aviation."

Manuel R. Ochoa, a cadet from New Mexico State University, said that the exposure to actual aircraft is a big plus.

"Most people have to wait until after college before they get into an airplane," he said. "They spend all that time wishing to be a pilot, and then get into an airplane, and sometimes they don't like it. For me, I'm getting (to fly in) my first year in college."

The orientation program includes an informal meeting with installation representatives, typically com-

manders and other officers, to talk to cadets about flight, Hunter said.

"I try to get them excited about flying," Hunter said. Ideally, the program will pay off in the form of new officer recruits down the road, Hunter said.

"Hopefully, they'll recall this program when the time comes to choose a career," he said. "... We hope they choose to stay in aviation."

If the recent class' enthusiasm about the program is any indication, those hopes may one day become a reality. Monica Sowell, a computer science student at North Carolina A&T State University, said the diversity of students in the FAST program makes it a positive experience.

"We have Hispanics, blacks and whites, and we all get along well," she said. "I think this program is a wonderful initiative."

The program has Sowell thinking of joining a very exclusive minority-black female pilots.

"There aren't too many female pilots in the Air Force, let alone African-American female pilots," she said. "I like being different, so I figured this was a good way to do it. Without a doubt, I see myself flying in the Air Force one day."



HONOR GUARD

Service benefits Airmen, Air Force mission

The Kirtland AFB Honor Guard performs at funerals, special ceremonies and retirements. Part of the long hours of team practice is learning to properly handle and fold the American flag. From left to right are: Airman 1st Class Jennifer Campbell, 551st Special Operations Squadron; Senior Airman An-

thony Holly, an honor guard team trainer, from the 58th Maintenance Squadron; Airman 1st Class Matthew Garner, 377th Mission Support Squadron; and Senior Airman Mel Acata, 377th Security Forces Squadron. See more photos on Pages 16, 17, 18.

Photo by Keith Pederson